

## VENEERED ELEGANCE

Skal bzang tshe brtan སྐལ་བཟང་ཙེ་བརྟན།

Lha mo twiddled her bright fingernails as she opened WeChat. Irritated and disoriented, she intended to delete every male friend, relative, stranger, homie, classmate, and teacher on her WeChat list. She was determined to untie these virtual relationships. But, after deleting one specific male friend, she decided that it was enough for the moment. She next accessed her photo albums, selecting what she was sure was her best selfie. Holding a selfie stick in her right hand, she posed in a Skal ba yar 'gro<sup>1</sup> scarlet summer robe, while revealing her right arm to display a black and white striped turtleneck. Silver and gold decorations adorned her from head to toe. The background was melancholic - a deserted land with grass turned gray and overcast.

She typed, "Freshening up to regain my elegance. Ain't no one gonna stop me!"

She intermittently checked her WeChat friend circle and soon received fifty-two likes from her friend list of 450. She was content.

Lha mo went to a public shower near her dormitory where a long wall separated the male and female shower rooms. She took a quick shower in a small white-tiled stall, warm torrents of water cascading on her 36-29-38 figure.

After drying her hair, and wiping her moist body with a long blue towel, she put on a purple skirt, red camisole, a black and white striped blouse, black and white Vans shoes, and a tight black leather jacket. She then scurried to her dorm room where she put her shampoo, body soap, and face wash into the top drawer of her closet. After that, she spent a half-hour drawing dark eyebrows, coloring her fingernails magenta, patting white powder on her tanned face, and then inserted her blue cosmetic contact lenses.

She was ready for action!

<sup>†</sup>Skal bzang tshe brtan. 2019. Veneered Elegance. *Asian Highlands Perspectives* 58:368-370.

<sup>1</sup> Skal ba yar 'gro 'fortune increment' is a Tibetan clothes brand.

She went to a mall in the city center in a green-blue taxi while continuing to check the exponentially growing number of likes and comments. One commentator offered, "Terminated tragically in a second romance, be strong as you were the first time you left me."

She wondered why she had told every one of her secrets to a middle school male friend - her Number One - who had secretly visited her dormitory on and off during the last year of her stay in middle school.

Seven years had passed since she had graduated. From Lha mo's point of view, she and her secret visitor were not in love, but certainly curious about kissing, hugging, touching, and sex. The boy enjoyed the risk of being discovered by teachers.

After graduation, he had become a shepherd and had few chances to meet gorgeous schoolgirls. He enjoyed recalling his time with her in school and sporadically sent greetings.

Lha mo wanted to post a harsh reply, and typed, "Teachers noticed your intrusion into the girls' dorm room. The headmaster punished you. You had to strip and walk naked around the classroom for one minute. Insanely shameful!"

She went inside the mall and detected perfume wafting through the entire first floor. A fragrance wafting from a perfume store at the corner of the entrance immobilized her. She quickly pulled herself away and noticed a couple wearing identical clothes, and escalating down to the basement where clothes for males were on display. Lha mo automatically turned to a flight of stairs and walked up to the second floor. It was unsettling to go down to where she and Number Two had visited.

It was too miserable to excavate the past, recalling past shopping expeditions and periodic jokes that she and that man had shared.

On the second floor, she stepped into a shop, attracted by a black gown on the top right corner of a wardrobe. She vividly recalled a hotel room where she had watched *Wonder Woman* with him. He had mentioned that the actress would be perfect if attired in a black gown instead of a red one.

In the last four years in college, he had been chivalrous and faithful. He was tall and had a sharp nose, oval face, curly hair, and smelled of cologne. He perfectly resembled a star in a Korean movie.

"A black gown is perfect for a woman in deep agony over a man, who started dating another girl whom he had only known for three days. Despite this betrayal, I still have strong feelings for him," Lha mo mused while retreating from the mall.

Lha mo proceeded down an alley wearing the black gown, a pair of red boots, and tight-dark-blue jeans. Several teenage boys observed Lha mo and murmured among themselves. A big muscular lad approached Lha mo and asked for her WeChat account by clicking the QR code scanner in WeChat, wanting to add her as a friend.

Lha mo did not even acknowledge him with a look.

Among crowds of pedestrians, she was as flawless as she hoped. Even though a third encounter was yet uncertain, she was sure she would eventually encounter pure love.

#### TIBETAN TERMS

lha mo ལྷ་མོ།

skal bzang tshe brtan སྐལ་བཟང་ཚེ་བརྟན།